"Respecttfily, Thaddeus"

MARY ALICE KESSLER

Thad is a good man. He is old and gnarled like some dying oak tree, and about as hard to uproot and argue with as an oak tree, but Thad is a good man. The last time I saw Thad was in the fall of 1939. He stood at the end of the gravel road that leads into our hunting lodge, one bowed leg stuck up on the birch fence railing, and looked after our car. He must have been at least seventy then, for his thinning hair was white and his red beard was streaked with snow. Those b'ue, deep-set eyes were old, and they always crackled with fire when he was happy. Thad was mostly happy about the trees changing color, or the snow lying heavy on the lodge roof. He was happy when he saw a blue heron coming in low over the tips of the pines, the sun intensifying the lovely blue of its arched wings. He was happy when his tame red fox, Jimmy, came up to his door for a hand-out, or when the black skies were covered with waves of milky stars. These wonderful, little things made Thad happy, and his eyes were almost never without that blue fire of joy.

He was always full of stories about his woods when we sat in front of the blazing birch logs after a long day of hunting or fishing. It was at this time of night, when the crickets were tuning for their evening concert, and the cold winds blew in from the lake in an easy moan, that Thad, stretched out at our feet before the fire, drowsy from a hot flapjack or fried fish supper, opened his wealth of wood lore for us to examine. He always whittled as he told his tale, slowly, allowing it to creep into our sleepy minds and lull us to the wilderness. For Thad was a good story teller.

He told us about the porcupines feeding the deer in the dead of winter.

"Ya know, them little prickly fellas scale a big pine trunk, an' they hang on at the top fer dear life, eatin' the bark an' the needles. An' every once in a while they drop sumpin' on the snow for the deer. The deer all herd in one spot like people when they're scart er bewildert, an' after they tramp that thick snow down fer a hour er so, they get caught in their own trap. They sink down in a circle a' ice, an' they kint git out, 'cause a' the snow drifts. When they're standin' there shiverin' and starvin', them porkepines throw 'em twigs an' bark to eat an' they're saved. Yep, they help eachuther in the bad times.

"And you should see them deer when they're after salt in the winter. They love salt. Nothin' in the world can attract 'em like salt stumps. So in the fall er late summer when you folks go back home, I put a lot-a' salt licks on the dead stumps out there in the clearin'. Sometimes eight er ten pretty little does and their baby fawns sidle up to the licks, an' they stand there on their stiff little legs an' lick the trunks down ta the ground. They lick the wood away with the salt. An' then, in the cold season, they come back for the roots. You've seen them holes when ya come in the spring, ain't ya? Well the deer go into the ground fer salt. Yep, they love salt."

On and on he would go with that fire in his eyes, his thin knees brought up to his chin, filling us with the strange history of "his wild creatures," until the old English clock on the mantle would strike

twelve and we would rise stiffly to go to an icy bed.

We haven't seen Thad now for five years. He writes to us in an awkward, childish scrawl about the lodge. He always says the same thing, but it's good to see his funny scratching on yellowed paper. And he never fails to end the letters with

"Respecttfily, Thaddeus."

Boy On A Bike

BETTY JO FARK

Clouds of heat were sitting on the highway. There was no breeze to stir them perceptibly. The boy was hot. He wanted to keep his feet high, away from the burning sun fused in the pavement, but the motion of the bicycle pedals kept drawing them down monotonously. His hands on the rubber grips of the handlebars were sweaty and uncomfortable. Streaks down both legs of his salt and pepper wash trousers showed where he had tried to wipe away the stickiness.

He tried riding "no-handed." The trial was unsuccessful. Having to slide the least bit from side to side because his legs were short was rather tricky, and, besides, riding "no-handed" decreased his speed. He sighed and resignedly gripped the handlebars again. His mother had told him to come straight home after working at the store because they were having company for supper. In spite of her instructions, he had stopped for a few minutes to take a swim with the gang in the old gravel pit a mile back on the highway. Now he had to hurry to make up for his stolen time.

He pedaled faster. He was sure glad he had saved his money to get his new, red bike. He could really travel fast on it.

A car honked in back of the boy. Promptly he coasted off the highway onto the shoulder of the road, leaving a miniature whirlwind of dust in his wake. If he had a horn, he would honk right back at the car. His bike was just as good as any car. It could go almost as fast as a car; it wasn't as expensive; it could go places a car couldn't go, and his bike was twice — no ten times — as shiny as any old car. Gee, he was proud of his bike.

He turned to watch the car go by. His eyes met the cold stare of a boy about his own size in the back seat of the car. He squared his narrow shoulders and began to pedal fast again. Riding fast created a cooling breeze around his face and the open neck of his blue sport shirt. He wondered if the boy in the car had a bike.

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"How much longer before we get home and I can get out of this hot car?" Ted asked his mother.

"About two more hours, dear," his mother answered. "We're more than half way there. We'll stop and rest for a while at the next town if you're tired."

"I'm tired, too," Sue added from the back seat.

"All right," her mother said. "We'll get a soda or something and then you'll both feel better."

"I don't like sodas. I want a malt," Ted said.